

Pacifica Tribune



Lance Huntley photo

The WBFR radio cast – Gary Pugh Newman, Joanie Pugh Newman, Kelly Gregg Rubingh and William Rhea – deliver "It's a Wonderful Life" via the Golden Age of Radio. (Missing in photo but equally fabulous are Rob Hedges and Jason Bustos.)

THEATER REVIEW

Spindrift Players lasso the moon

By Jean Bartlett
Tribune Writer

In Frank Capra's 1946 film "It's a Wonderful Life," George Bailey promises his sweetheart Mary Hatch the moon. "What is it you want, Mary? You want the moon? Just say the word and I'll throw a lasso around it and pull it down." And George does give her the moon, never realizing until he is visited by his own guardian angel – Clarence Odbody, AS2 (Angel Second Class) – that a wonderful life is not marred by the potholes but built on the savored joys. And that is exactly what director Walter M. Mayes is presenting right now in the Muriel Watkin Performance Space of the Pacifica Spindrift Players with his production of "It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play." This is a real holiday charmer which in no way diminishes the Capra classic, but rather gives its audience another reason to celebrate one of the most beloved fictional characters of all time – George Bailey, the richest man in town.

Written by Joe Landry, first staged in 1996, and completely inspired by the film, "It's a Wonderful Life," the play takes place on December 24, 1946 in Studio A at WBFR Radio "Playhouse of the Air." Hosted by Freddie Filmore, Freddie and the studio actors Jake Laurents, Sally Applewhite, Lana Sherwood and Harry "Jazzbo" Heywood re-enact the story of George Bailey, each voicing multiple characters. Also instrumental to the radio delivery is the Foley artist. A "Foley" is a sound effects engineer, who has to creatively deliver sounds like: wind-driven snow, breaking glass, the splash of someone falling into water, a siren, closing doors, ringing bells, thunder from heaven, etc.

The radio studio stage comes complete with a flashing "applause" sign and photos of WBFR's radio stars which dot the wall, including a blue-eyed well-known fellow named Bing. The radio cast also performs several commercial jingles, completely adding to the charm and the mirth, and in between delivering the lines from their scripts and, in some cases, dropping their finished pages on the floor, the actors take a seat, drink coffee, smoke, and give each other the eye or sometimes the rolling eyes.

Real life married couple Joanie Pugh Newman and Gary Pugh Newman play, respectively, Lana Sherwood (as Violet Bick, Zuzu Bailey, Mrs. Hatch, etc.) and Harry "Jazzbo" Heywood (as Clarence Obody, Harry Bailey, Bert the Cop, etc.) – and they are the Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt of the Pacifica stage. Both so good, so deeply engrained in every character they play, it is almost impossible to believe they each have a day job.

Kelly Gregg Rubingh plays Sally Applewhite (as Mary Hatch) and she portrays Mary perfectly – sweet, thoughtful and caring – and then as soon as she takes a break from the microphone and is just her little old self, Sally Applewhite, she is a subtle hoot. William Rhea plays Jake Laurents (as George Bailey) and he is all heart. Rob Hedges as Freddie Filmore (as Mr. Gower, Uncle Billy, Mr. Potter, etc.) is pure delight. Jason Bustos as Foley Man is loaded with precision timing and comic genius.

This is an exceptionally clever, joy-producing Pacifica Spindrift Players production, quite literally filling its audience with giggles and smiles. It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas.

"It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play" directed by Walter M. Mayes plays the Muriel Watkin Performance Space of PSP, 1050 Crespi Drive, Pacifica. Through December 16. Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. Sundays at 2 p.m. Tickets: \$20. Box Office: 650-359-8002 or online at www.pacificaspindriftplayers.org.

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